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Dining Scene

Shhbb . . . Greenville, South Carolina, has become a culinary hot spot.

BY WAYNETTE GOODSON

When your heirloom tomato salad arrives to the table at Soby's New South Cuisine, chances are chef Shaun Garcia plucked the tomatoes from his garden that morning. Want proof? Your server can bring the bright red beauties for you to see for yourself.

Honored with numerous awards for excellence by *Wine Spectator*, Soby's is known for its farm-to-table

slant. Garcia tends to his seven-acre farm daily before heading to the restaurant, and all of his produce goes into menu items, such as pan-roasted grouper served on chilled potato salad, a summer favorite.

Two decades ago Greenville was not a foodie destination. But thanks to notable restaurants like Soby's, the city has quietly pulled up a chair to the dining scene. In fact, chefs from all over the world visit on a

monthly basis to host guest chef evenings. Thomas Keller, Guy Savoy, Craig Deihl, Alexandra Guarnaschelli, and hometown celebrity chef Tyler Florence have all taken turns in downtown kitchens. Who knew?

It all started in 1997 when restaurateur Carl Sobocinski saw potential in a 100-year-old building downtown that was once a cotton exchange. The opening of his Soby's New South Cuisine kicked off an

PHOTOS (CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE) COURTESY OF DEVEREAUX'S, STELLA'S SOUTHERN BISTRO, HIGH COTTON GREENVILLE, SOBY'S, AND THOMAS CREEK



Stella's BBQ Pork Spring Roll; (below) High Cotton; (opposite) Devereaux's kitchen



explosion of downtown eateries. "The dining scene started with more of a low-country flair, and we still have plenty of that," Sobocinski says. "But we've also branched out. We have a Persian restaurant, Pomegranate on Main, and Thai food at Lemongrass."

You might not expect to experience flavors from around the world in Greenville, but business calls for it: Located on I-85 halfway between Charlotte, North Carolina, and Atlanta, the city is the North Ameri-

can headquarters for Michelin, and BMW has a major manufacturing center nearby. Their international presence has helped spin off ethnic



Chef's Table

A culinary tour called "At the Chef's Table" gives visitors the chance to meet chefs and dine at their tables.

First stop: **The Loft at Soby's**, a private dining space where chef Rodney Freidank entertains with a cooking demonstration of the day's first dish, such as fried green tomatoes topped with homemade pimento cheese, paired with a refreshing libation (lemonade, anyone?).

Next, **Soby's on the Side** presents a behind-the-scenes view of chefs at work, along with a generous tasting at this deli, bakery, and catering hub of the Table 301 restaurant group. After a historic walking tour across the Reedy River, guests proceed to **The Lazy Goat** for a drink-making demonstration (perhaps an inside peek at the white sangria recipe) followed by a meeting with chef Victoria Moore, who serves delicious appetizers, such as fried goat cheese with pistachio dust and honey drizzle.



The fourth stop, **Soby's New South Cuisine**, starts with a manager's choice of drinks (invigorating fruit-infused vodka cocktails) followed by chef Shaun Garcia's presentation of signature Southern dishes like shrimp and grits made from succulent local shrimp and Anson Mills grits. Finally, **Devereaux's** chef Spencer Thomson serves a decadent dessert such as chocolate macadamia nut tart to end the tour on the sweetest of notes. For more info, go to table301.com.

restaurants (Italian, Indian, Spanish, Asian, French), as well as acclaimed festivals. For example, the culinary celebration Euphoria, September 22–25, serves up cooking demonstrations and performances by top chefs, winemakers, and nationally known musicians, such as hometown boy and event co-founder Edwin McCain. (euphoriagreenville.com)

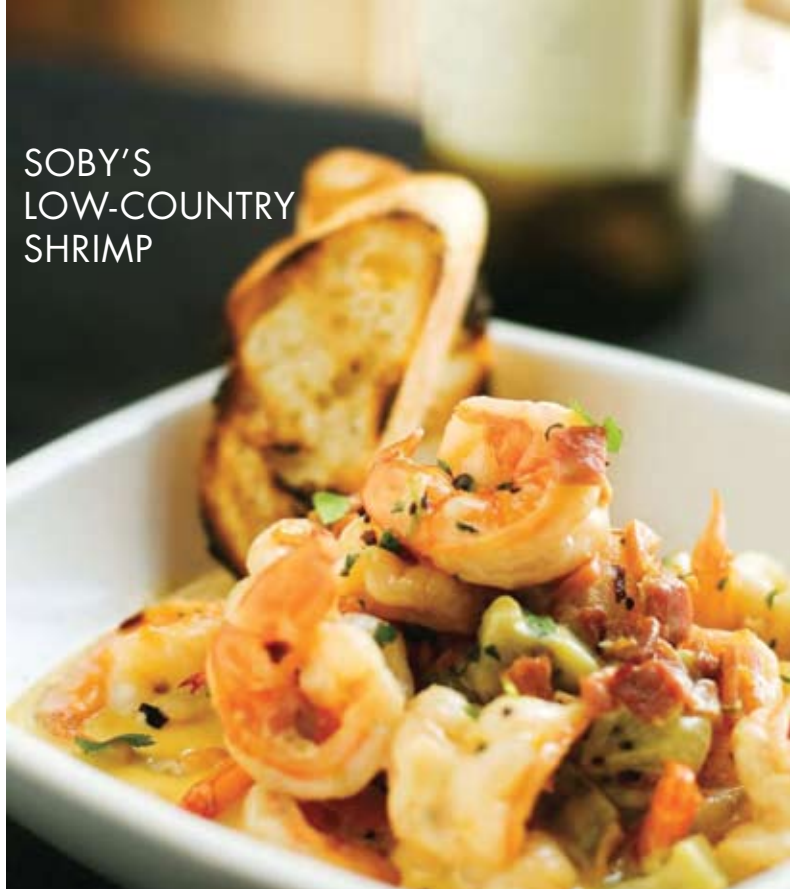


In keeping with the farm-to-table trend, food awareness has become increasingly important, and many restaurants list the local farms where they get their ingredients. Try the Bethel Trails Farm pork chop at High Cotton Greenville or the Split Creek Farm goat cheese salad at American Grocery Restaurant.

Other local favorites include Devereaux's (48-hour short ribs), Luna Rosa Gelato Cafe (chocolate velvet and pistachio), and Stella's Southern Bistro (mac 'n' cheese with Benton's country ham). The Cafe at Williams Hardware specializes in comfort food (barbecue chicken quesadillas), and the mouth-watering steaks at Rick Erwin's West End Grille are consistently voted the best in Greenville.

Foodies love the new gastropub Nose Dive (the first and only restaurant in the Upstate region to offer wine on tap), the Belgium-influenced

SOBY'S LOW-COUNTRY SHRIMP



Watauga County Ham, Kiwi, Chardonnay Cream

*1/2 lb. country ham, sliced
1/8-inch thick
1 tbs. olive oil
1 tsp. crushed red pepper flakes
2 lb. shrimp (21–25 ct.), peeled
and deveined
1 1/2 cups chardonnay
6 kiwis, peeled and diced
1 pint heavy cream
1 tsp. cornstarch
1 tbs. water
salt and fresh ground black pepper*

Dice ham. Heat olive oil in large skillet. Add ham and red pepper flakes. Sauté until ham becomes slightly crisp and has given its flavor to the oil. Add shrimp and sauté until shrimp are half cooked, about 2 minutes. Remove shrimp and reserve. Add wine to pan and simmer to reduce by half. Add kiwi and heavy cream and simmer until liquid is reduced by half again. Add shrimp and cook until shrimp are completely cooked, about 2 more minutes. Mix cornstarch and water to make a slurry. With sauce boiling, drizzle in slurry until sauce becomes thick enough to coat the back of a spoon. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

For more recipes, check out *Soby's New South Cuisine* cookbook.

Trappe Door, The Chocolate Moose cupcake shop, and the Slow Food Upstate Earth Market, a network of local farmers' markets.

For imbibers, The Community Tap offers craft beers including Greenville's own Thomas Creek. The Art Bar on Main blends culture with wine in a gallery-within-a-bar twist. And opening this month, the

Dark Corner Distillery will be the city's first legal moonshine distillery.

With so much exciting dining action, surely Greenville won't be a secret for long. For more information, visit greenvillevb.com.

WANT TO GO? Fly to Greenville from Charlotte, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C.